



Akron Public
Schools®

SOLVING THE PUZZLE

How Each Piece Shapes Our Students' Educational Journey

*Dr. Michael Robinson, Ed.D
Superintendent
Akron Public Schools*



*A message from our
Superintendent of Schools*



A large, black, handwritten signature of Dr. Michael Robin. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned below the title.

As I reflect back on my first 100 days – and first year – as Superintendent of Akron Public Schools, I am reminded of how blessed and fortunate I am to oversee such a wonderful school district.

I spent this past year meeting with various stakeholder groups, and I have appreciated the candid conversations and unique perspectives. Every one of them has helped me to grow and to learn more about the City of Akron and our schools. I've encountered countless people who believe in our district and support our vital work.

Change is not easy, and the implementation of change can be equally difficult. However, during my first 100 days and throughout this first year, I've worked diligently to build strong and meaningful relationships with our Board of Education and members of our community – including parents and other stakeholders. There is still work to do in this area, but I am proud of our accomplishments. At my core, being collaborative and results-oriented is a huge part of who I am.

I've also worked to engage our scholars, as their voices contribute to many of the decisions that we make on a daily basis. To engage the community, I've spent weekends visiting churches, attending community meetings, ward meetings and other functions in our city. As we expand our communication office, it will afford us the opportunity to do even more to connect with our employees, families and communities.

In my *100 Day Plan*, I focused on five priority areas that reflect goals and guardrails that have helped us begin our collaborative journey toward academic excellence. In this first year, we were able to implement our *Blueprint for Excellence: the Strategic Plan* and received the *Transition Report*.

I am proud to call Akron home. It's a wonderful city, with a rich heritage and history that has set the tone for a thriving and prosperous future. I am also grateful to the Akron Board of Education for allowing me to serve as Superintendent of Schools. There is still work to do, and I am excited to have such a phenomenal team and staff to help take APS to the next level.

Indeed, the best is yet to come.



Akron Public Schools®



Left to right: Job Perry, Barbara Sykes, Rene Molenaur, Carla Jackson, Superintendent Dr. Robinson, Diana Autry, Summer Hall and Bruce Alexander



Our Board of Education

Trust • Collaboration • Communication • Respect

PRIORITY AREAS FOR LISTENING AND LEARNING: ACCELERATING ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND GUARDRAILS

These five priority areas for listening and learning will help to inform my thoughts, ideas and decisions as we work together to achieve the *Goals and Guardrails* in support of our Akron Public School scholars.



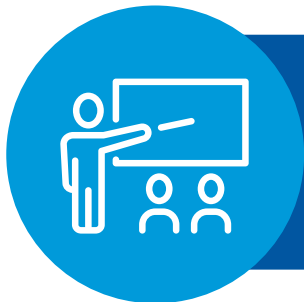
Priority Area I

Assess student / staff well-being and safety



Priority Area II

Engage the school board and stakeholders to build trust



Priority Area III

Assess teaching and learning



Priority Area IV

Assess district leadership capacity and alignment



Priority Area V

Assess district operations, facilities and finances



Priority Area I

Assess student / staff well-being and safety

THE GOAL Emotional and physical safety must become a way of life for how we manage our schools. Students and staff cannot excel if they are not physically or emotionally safe. As a school district, we must approach issues of well-being and safety as a collaborative effort, convening conversations with members of the board of education as well as key and diverse stakeholders, scholars, parents, citizens, the business community, our neighborhoods, school leaders, teachers and elected officials at all levels. This helps to create a safety net for students and staff to learn, work and grow. Our approach to student well-being and safety will offer our scholars access to increased equitable access and opportunities to engage in healthy, meaningful activities, which will help them foster positive mindsets. We will work to ensure that our scholars see the wealth of opportunities Akron Public Schools offers them to become productive citizens.

ACTION STEPS

- 1.1 Assess the investments that have been made to the implementation of MTSS (*Multi-Tiered System of Support*), which encompasses restorative practices; PBIS (*Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies*); support programs; and SEL (*Social Emotional Learning*). MTSS will also address chronic absenteeism and school-wide discipline.
- 1.2 Review our approach to student and staff mental health support and determine whether we are appropriately investing, inclusive of staffing, in coordinated mental health supports and services and inclusive of external agencies for all students and staff.
- 1.3 Review how we receive and respond to feedback from students, staff, parents, and community members regarding school climate and safety issues, as well as implement and convene appropriate advisory groups.
- 1.4 Review and assess our school/district accountability system and data relative to culture/climate, suspensions and expulsions, with a particular focus on violent offenses within and around our schools, as well as how schools are reporting various incidents.
- 1.5 Develop advisory committees and partnerships with external partners to support the needs of our scholars and teachers.
- 1.6 Assess possibilities to expand summer, after-school, and co-curricular programming activities in collaboration with local agencies, grassroots organizations and key stakeholders.



Priority Area II Engage the school board and stakeholders to build trust

THE GOAL Akron Public Schools will only continue to grow and achieve excellence through an authentic and collaborative relationship between the board, superintendent and our stakeholders. Building trust starts with listening to understand, followed by collaborating and communicating effectively as partners to help all of our scholars succeed. It is essential for us to understand the hopes and dreams of our board members, community, students, families, staff, city and state leaders, unions, universities, activists, grassroots organizations, and business leaders. In addition, we must ensure that we have strong, collaborative structures and evaluate how we are communicating internally and externally.

ACTION STEPS

- 2.1 Schedule Board of Education retreats to review communication protocols, forthcoming priorities and the superintendent evaluation process. This should be a time to bond, listen, learn and get to know each other better.
- 2.2 Evaluate internal communication protocols – including social media strategy – to determine how system-wide messages are understood by board members, principals and staff, including instructional, non-instructional and central office.
- 2.3 Host in-person and remote town hall sessions to meet with teachers, administrators, support staff, other school-based staff, central office employees and unions to understand what is working and what are areas of stress/anxiety.
- 2.4 Launch “listening and learning” tours/roundtables to understand the exact priorities and needs of all communities and stakeholders – especially parents and families.
- 2.5 Assess the current state of the district’s communication and engagement efforts, as well as evaluate the quality of the school district and schools’ websites, collaboration and trust.
- 2.6 Engage and build trust with the board and stakeholders.
- 2.7 Connect and communicate with other school system superintendents, especially “The Big 8,” to build relationships, exchange ideas and offer support.



Priority Area III

Assess teaching and learning

THE GOAL Teaching and learning that results in improved academic achievement and reaching the “Goals and Guardrails” is our core work. This cannot be compromised. Producing scholars who are able to read, write, think critically and analytically, compute mathematically at rigorous levels, and articulate an application of content is essential and must be done consistently. We also must implement an accountability system that will validate our efforts. This will strengthen coherence in the implementation of our instructional programs and ensure that our teachers and schools have the tools they need to prioritize high-quality teaching and learning. We’ll work to ensure that all scholars not only graduate from Akron Public Schools with a high school diploma but that they’re fully prepared to meet the challenges of post-secondary life. This must be the goal and responsibility of all district employees, contractors and volunteers.

ACTION STEPS

- 3.1 Assess the current process of school improvement planning (including School Improvement Plans) and ensure that schools are implementing MTSS (*Multi-Tiered System of Support*) with fidelity.
- 3.2 Assess the coherence of teaching and learning across APS in all content and elective areas, especially around the district's literacy and numeracy instructional frameworks.
- 3.3 Review the systems accountability system around academics and focus on areas of under-performance, as well as ensure strategies are in place to address root causes of student achievement trends via frequent, ongoing data reviews at all levels.
- 3.4 Develop a process for frequent and structured school visits to observe and support school improvement efforts, as well as work with central office and school leaders on norms and protocols (Instructional Rounds and Data Wise).
- 3.5 Determine how comprehensive and research-based the current curricula are and to what degree they are aligned to standards that allow for student achievement/growth and the infusion of technology.
- 3.6 Assess current professional development efforts to support administrative, instructional and non-instructional staff and how the budget emphasizes an investment in staff development.
- 3.7 Assess student and staff attendance rates, student dropout rates and student graduation rates to support progress toward the Goals and Guardrails.



Priority Area IV

Assess district leadership capacity and alignment

THE GOAL It is essential for Akron Public Schools to have a high-performing, collaborative and results-oriented culture. To make sure that we operate as a professional, highly effective team, we will be intentional about assessing and building the capacity of our leadership to achieve the *Goals and Guardrails*. As author Jim Collins states, we will ensure that we have the right people on the bus and in the right seats. We will not get to excellence by accident – it will be by design. To move APS forward, it must be a strong collaboration between the superintendent, the board of education and all stakeholders.

ACTION STEPS

- 4.1 Conduct a retreat with senior staff, while planning a follow-up retreat to review the district's priorities, most recent achievement data and accountability system; to review current and anticipated vacancies; and to discuss leadership team protocols, systems structures and practices.
- 4.2 Administer leadership assessment inventories to get to know executive leadership better.
- 4.3 Review current office structure, alignment and capacity to achieve the Goals and Guardrails.
- 4.4 Conduct one-on-one interviews and review resumes and briefing papers with all direct reports.
- 4.5 Assess the autonomy and authority of school leaders (Principals and Assistant Principals) in the current organizational structure.
- 4.6 Establish a transition team comprised of members of the Akron Public Schools community, local leaders and K-12 national experts.
- 4.7 Establish a Think-Tank and Coherence Framework and Theory of Change to address systems, structures, protocols and data.



Priority Area V

Assess district operations, facilities and finances

THE GOAL To meet the needs of all students in Akron Public Schools. It is critical that operations and finances align with board policy and represent excellence and transparency. We must ensure that how we fund schools and programs aligns to our strategic plan. Ultimately, school improvement plans will be aligned to the strategic plan as well. All budgets will represent the needs of our scholars. Each division will be appraised to determine how they maximize allocations, supports and services to schools using a continuous improvement model. Additionally, we will assess the depth of our facilities issues.

ACTION STEPS

- 5.1 Review the district's fund balance, financial projections, resource allocation and budgeting processes; assess how the district's budget and budget process are aligned to support student achievement; and schedule a one-on-one meeting with the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) to discuss budgets, services and protocols.
- 5.2 Review the assessments of the district's facilities conditions, and take actions to determine alignment with improving student achievement guided by the *Goals and Guardrails* and the *Facilities Plan (FP)* and process. There must be an alignment between academics and the FP.
- 5.3 Receive an update on any foundation activities and how those funds support schools.
- 5.4 Conduct one-on-one meetings with direct reports on operations, human resources and budget, including use of ESSR funds and how local, state and federal grants are being utilized and evaluated.
- 5.5 Review key district financial materials, budget, most recent audits, grants and any other reports and audits provided by the Office of the Inspector General and Board's Office of Auditing Services.
- 5.6 Conduct one-on-one meeting with the Office of General Counsel to review any recent/current legal proceedings or outstanding judgments against the district and to provide a briefing on state education code with attention to statutes currently impacting or likely to impact the district.
- 5.7 Review current labor contracts and schedules. Meetings will be scheduled with the unions to discuss pertinent matters to establish collaboration.



Students have a civil right to true, authentic, rigorous educational experiences and opportunities that will prepare them for a world that none of us knows.

Dr. Michael Robinson, Ed.D
Superintendent • Akron Public Schools

